

Underreported Information Regarding Israeli Society Today

Introduction

For more than a century, there has been controversy between Jewish and Arab people regarding the State of Israel. The debate goes back to when the Ottoman Empire (years 1517-1917) was in control and divided Jerusalem into three areas based on religion including Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Throughout the centuries, the land of Israel has been controlled by many different empires, but since the 1948 War, Israel has belonged to the Jewish people with Palestinians living in Israel and various surrounding areas including the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Today, there are many controversial viewpoints regarding who the land should belong to and how the state of Israel should coexist with Palestinians. As the media often reports biased information regarding the Israeli conflict, much information goes unreported regarding how Palestinians and Israelis successfully coexist today, the benefits Palestinians receive from the State of Israel, and how they could coexist in the future.

History

History regarding the land of Israel dates back to around 1000 B.C. The information historians have gathered from the Old Testament describe Abraham as the father of both Judaism and Islam. His descendants were enslaved by Egyptians until settling in Canaan, modern day Israel. Once they settled, King David ruled the region, and his son, King Solomon, built the first temple in Jerusalem. The Jews and Muslims have always identified Jerusalem to be a sacred, holy place. In 931 B.C. the region was divided into two kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. In 586 B.C. Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the first temple built by King Solomon (Editors 2017.) After World War I ended with a victory for the Allies in 1917,

Great Britain gained control of Israel. During the Ottoman Empire's ruling in the 19th and 20th century, the Jews created the Zionist movement in order to reestablish an independent Jewish homeland in Palestine. Through the Zionist movement in the late 19th century, Jews immigrated to Palestine through five waves of immigration from the late 1800s until 1948. The influx of immigrants led to greater tensions between the Jewish people and Arabs in Palestine, as the Arabs did not support the influx of immigrants.

Towards the end of WWI, Great Britain's concern for the outcome of the war grew and they sought support from the Jewish people. The British created the Balfour Declaration, which supported Zionism and set the guidelines towards reestablishing a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine. After WWI ended, the Balfour Declaration was approved by the League of Nations, causing great concern among the Arabs living in the region (Balfour Declaration letter written 2009.) As a resolution, at the end of WW II, the United Nations tried to divide the British Mandate of Palestine into a Jewish and Arab state. However, the Arab people rejected it and the land of Israel became an independent Jewish state in 1948.

Immediately after Israel became an independent state, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, and Syria attacked Israel. The Egyptians gained control of the Gaza strip and the West Bank became Jordanian territory. After the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the Arab people continued to attack the land of Israel for the next several decades. The wars and attacks on Israel came from various groups in many different ways. The Egyptian President started the Suez Crisis in 1956 by dominating and nationalizing the Suez Canal, the port way connecting the Mediterranean and Red Sea. This led to an Israeli attack on the Sinai Peninsula, with the help of French and British forces, to regain control of the waterway (Editors 2017.)

In 1964, Lebanon created the Palestine Liberation Organization, which focused on the creation of a Palestinian state within the borders of Israel. They identified Arabs as Palestinian if they lived in the land of Israel before 1947 (Editors 2017.) The invention of a Palestinian identity emerged, even though there was no group of people called the “Palestinians” in the pre-state era. Rather, Arabs in Israel at that time were nomadic Arab tribes. It is noteworthy that the Romans named the geographic location “Palestine” in an attempt to ensure Jews would never have a claim to return, as the Ancient philistine people were ancient enemies of the Jews.

In 1967, the six-day war evolved as Egypt threatened to close the Suez Canal shipping port to Israel. As a result, Israel defeated Egypt, Jordan and Syria and regained complete control over the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and Golan Heights. Six years later, Egypt and Syria attacked Israel on Yom Kippur, the holiest holiday in the Jewish religion. They launched air strikes demanding control of the Golan Heights. After two weeks, the war ended as the United Nations called a ceasefire. Years later, in 1981, “Israel annexed the Golan Heights, but Syria continued to claim it as territory” (Editors 2017.) The next year, Israel invaded south Lebanon aiming to remove the Palestine Liberation Organization, who were connected to the Iranian terrorist group Hezbollah. Hezbollah repeatedly attacked Israel and were part of an attempted assassination of Israel’s ambassador of the United Kingdom. After the invasion, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) occupied a southern region in Lebanon and surrounded the PLO.

In 1987, the ‘First Palestinian Intifada’ transpired as a reaction to Israel’s occupation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank (Editors 2017.) It started when an IDF vehicle crashed into an Arab civilian car killing four citizens. The attacks, which resulted in hundreds of deaths, went on until 1993 when the Israeli Prime Minister and Palestine Liberation Organization negotiator signed the Oslo Accord. The agreement forced the Israeli government to accept the PLO as the

representative body for the Palestinians, and in return the PLO promised to abolish terrorism and recognize Israel's existence. The two leaders also agreed that a "Palestinian authority would be established and assume governing responsibilities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip over a five-year period" (The Oslo Accords and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process.)

In 2000 the Palestinians started another Intifada against Israel when Ariel Sharon, an Israeli politician, visited the Temple Mount. The Palestinians attacked Israel for years, throwing stones, gunfire, and suicide bombings (Editors 2017.) Thousands of civilians, both Israeli and Palestinian, were killed. The Intifada ended with IDF troops and Jewish settlements completely removed from the Gaza Strip. However, the Palestinian violence continued.

In 2006, the second Lebanon War occurred when the Hezbollah terrorist group shot rockets at northern Israel and kidnapped two Israeli soldiers. The war ended as the UN forced a resolution requiring both militaries to exchange their prisoners (Second Lebanon War 2006.) Today, while there are no visible wars waging in the region, the Israeli-Arab conflict is still very much apparent within the land. Still, there are frequent and numerous attacks on Israel. Each event is dealt with individually, sometimes resulting in less access for Arabs into Israeli territory or a counterattack to their actions. Ultimately, throughout all of the history, the way the Jewish people govern the land of Israel has given greater opportunity to a wider variety of people than any other empire previously in power.

Government

Every four years the members of the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, are elected by the citizens. The Knesset is made up of 120 seats, with twelve parties representing different interests and people. In order to get one seat on Parliament, each candidate needs 3.25% of the Israeli population to vote for them. All Israeli citizens are able to vote in these elections and have been

since the first election (Rudnitzky 2019.) “It is one of the few places in the Middle East where Arab women may vote” (Bard 2019.) The Likud party, which is the largest party in parliament with twenty-nine seats is run by Benjamin Netanyahu. At the same time, the Arab Democratic Party, representing the Arab-Israeli citizens, has thirteen members. The Knesset works to make sure all citizens of Israel are represented in the government and have their voices heard.

However, in an op-ed piece written in 2015, Israeli Arab Dr. Sami Miaari spoke about the Arab Knesset member’s lack of professionalism. She explained that the socioeconomic divide between different Arab communities is causing many protests in communities with high unemployment rates. She wrote, the “refusal of some Arab leaders to condemn the violence and murder of citizens is inexplicable” (Miaari 2015.) Conversely, Mahmoud Abbas, the leader in the West Bank, was never elected by the citizens and has overrun his term limit by almost ten years.

Cultural Concepts

Apart from political standards, inside Israel each religion’s cultural concepts are widely accepted. For example, marriage is not considered a civil issue, the Israeli government does not define how a couple of any religion should be married (Aharon.) Jews, Muslims, Christians, Druze, and those of any other religion can be legally married in Israel by their own religious leader with their own standards. Consistent with the respect for different cultures and religions in Israel, any religious dress code is accepted in all degrees. If a woman wants to wear a hijab, sheital, bourka, or no covering, there is tolerance for all.

Employment

The overall tolerance of the society is visible and demonstrates how the two cultures co-exist at work, school, and as a tourist. The Guardian article, ‘The Israelis and Palestinians who work together in peace’ explains the environment in various areas around Israel. The article talks

about two cardiologists, Siham Sheble Masarwa, an Israeli Arab and Chaim Lotin, an Israeli Jew who work together at Hadasah Ein Kerem hospital in Jerusalem. Masarwa explained his experience at Hadasah Ein Kerem as very smooth, despite the division on the streets of Jerusalem. He has been given permission by the Israeli government to work at the hospital and drive in his Palestinian-registered car. He explained that his grandmother is his motivation as she died from a heart attack since there was “no interventional cardiology treatment in the Palestinian territories” (Shuttleworth 2016.) Masarwa wants to bring what he’s learned back to Palestinian public hospitals. Similarly, Lotin explained “the way we do things in the hospital is the future for this country – we have to start somewhere” (Shuttleworth 2016.) Chaim was a part of the 1973 Yom Kippur war and blames that event for a lot of his views on politics. However, he has treated and still treats Palestinians who have been part of the attacks on Israel. The article also talks about Sikkuy, a tour run by Jewish and Arab citizens to show tourists various Arab villages in the area. A large number of both Jews and Arabs attends these tours. The article reported that during Ramadan, Sikkuy held more than fifty tours with diverse groups of people. Ultimately, the history does still affect a lot of the culture in Israel, but with the resources available, individuals and companies are pushing past it to work together to create a better future.

Education

Employment opportunities in Israel have been greater for Jewish people than Arabs considering the lack of education Arabs have received in the past. However, in recent years the Israeli government has been putting forth effort to give equal opportunity to Arab citizens. One main attributor to this issue is Arab citizens aren’t required to serve in the Israeli army. Therefore, Israeli-Arabs don’t qualify for the same benefits and jobs as Veterans do in the army

socialization process. Another factor Mitchell Bard explained in Jewish Virtual Library, “Arab villages have historically received less funding than Jewish areas and this has affected the quality of Arab schools, infrastructure and social services” (Bard 2019.) The Arab education system has had many issues in the past, one being the extreme growth rate of the Arab population. In the 1980s there were more students than schools and classrooms available. Sami Khalil Mar’i wrote in ‘The Future of Palestinian Arab Education in Israel, “there is an urgent need for the construction of 5,000 additional classrooms for Arab children” (Khalil Mar’i 1985.) The large number of students led to a disproportionate number of students to teacher ratio in the available classrooms. In addition to the ratio problem, it was found that the available teachers lacked the necessary education to teach. Khalil Mar’i wrote, “for the last ten years, the ratio of unqualified to qualified teachers has been stable at around fifty percent” (Khalil Mar’i 1985.) In the 50’s, Israel didn’t offer teacher trainings to Israeli Arabs. However, Arab teacher training institutions were created in the 60’s, aiming to solve the issue. Arab schools have grown in many ways, “at the time of Israel’s founding, only one Arab high school was operating, today, there are hundreds of Arab schools” as well as, “Israeli-Arab teachers in Israel’s state schools increased by 40% between 2013 and 2016” (Bard 2019.) Dr. David Koren, an advisor to the Mayor of Jerusalem explained another issue within the Arab education system in an interview with Nadav Shragai. He explained how many Palestinians want an Israeli education for their children, however, “Parents who choose an Israeli education are denounced, threatened and persecuted” by Palestinian Authority (Shragai 2018.)

In recent years, the number of Israeli-Arabs part-taking in higher education and competing for jobs at higher levels has increased immensely. Council for Higher Education reported the total number of Arab-Israeli students pursuing all forms of higher-education in

Israel rose by 78.5% from 2010 to 2017” (Bard 2019.) Apart from that, Arab-Israeli’s in Bachelor programs grew 60% from 2010 to 2017, and PhD candidates doubled from 3.5% to 6.7% from 2008 to 2019. “The number of Israeli-Arab students in master’s degree programs has risen even more dramatically by 90% between 2008 and 2018” (Bard 2019.) The increased opportunities have come from the many employment centers around Israel that help minorities of all backgrounds find employment. “In total these centers have helped 13,600 members of Israeli minority groups find employment and have provided assistance for more than 24,000 individuals.” (Bard 2019.) With regard to the increase in Arab education, high-tech offices are opening in various Arab towns. Nazareth, the largest Arab town in Israel has over 950 high-tech employees working at companies “such as Amdocs, Microsoft, and Broadcom” (Bard 2019.)

At the same time, Israel has many schools that are integrated with children of all backgrounds. *The Guardian* article described Max Rayne Hand in Hand, a bilingual school in Jerusalem between the Jewish neighborhood Patt, and Arab neighborhood Beit. In one class alone there are ten Muslims, five Christians, and four Jews. The school focuses on creating a change for the future of Israel. A Jewish teacher at the school, Guy Aloni explained, “we need to create a new perspective, a new narrative about how we want to see each other” (Shuttleworth 2016.) As of 2016 there were six Hand in Hand schools throughout Israel with over two hundred students on waiting lists. The organization’s goal is to have “fifteen integrated bilingual schools, which would engage a wider community of up to 20,000 Israelis, both Jews and Arabs” (Shuttleworth 2016.) Ultimately, there are issues within the Arab education system, although Israel is working to help them by giving citizens the opportunity to universally educate children, affording everyone the same chance.

Statistics

The media adds a negative outlook on the Israeli-Arab conflict through their misinterpretation that all Jewish and Arab citizens feel hate for those around them. Graphs from the Israeli Democracy Index of 2018 explain in percentages of how Israeli Jews and Arabs feel about various topics. One graph surveyed the level of solidarity felt within the Israeli-Jewish society for both Arabs and Jews. The results showed 31% of Jews and 21% of Arabs felt an average amount of solidarity. Meanwhile, 12% of Arabs and 8.5% of Jews felt a very high level of solidarity, while 29% of Arabs and 15% of Jews see the society as having a low level of solidarity (Herman, Anabi, Heller & Omar 2019.) These numbers show that while there are various views regarding the unity within the society, not one culture has a more prominent view than another. An additional noteworthy graphic surveyed the group that had the highest level of tension between them. The Jewish people voted their highest level of tension is between the right and left on foreign policy and security issues. On the other hand, Arabs voted their highest tension was between Arabs and Jews (Herman, Anabi, Heller & Omar 2019.) The data shows that Israeli Jews are more concerned by those with opposing political and religious perspectives rather than the Arabs around them. Lastly, a survey was taken asking Israeli Jews if Israeli Arabs pose a threat to the country's security. The results varied by political party, and religious group. Secular Jews voted 26%, whereas Haredi Jews voted 72%, the right voted 59%, while the left voted 8%(Herman, Anabi, Heller & Omar 2019.) This data shows that Israelis have greater issues within their own democracy than with the Arab citizens. However, the data suggests that as Israeli Jews are satisfied with co-existing with Arabs, they still fear the possible dissolution of the Jewish people by the Arabs. Considering the Arab birth rate is much greater than the Jewish birth rate, the repatriation of Palestinians would destroy the Jewish population in their homeland. Besides that risk, Israel is surrounded by many states that are specifically focused on the

destruction of the land, and the Jewish people. Dr. David Koren conveyed in his interview with Nadav Shragai regarding the citizenship of Palestinians in Israel, “the security problem is important, because in the end, residence can be taken away, but citizenship can’t be taken away” (Shragai 2018.) Koren specifies that this is not for every case, however, he believes loyalty goes along with identity, which causes more complexity to a solution at hand. Ultimately, the relationship between the two cultures have improved over the years but are lacking the support from the media to help develop societal norms. An improved overall understanding of life in Israel can help in many various, important ways.

Conclusion

The history within the land of Israel has so much depth as it has gone on for centuries. Every individual religious group has a different perspective on each event that happened, and how the land should be ruled today. Ultimately, with the greater population of the Arab people compared to Jews, and the overbearing hatred from the states surrounding Israel, it is imperative that Israel has the security it needs to protect the land and its people. At the same time, with the circumstances of today’s climate, Israel being an independent state for the Jewish people has given a wider variety of individuals a greater opportunity to life, education, and success than ever before.

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